

Washington, DC –Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) made the case for health care reform Thursday at the Health Care for America Now (HCAN) Pennsylvania Town Hall, part of HCAN's "We Can't Wait" Day of Action. Speaking to 750 union members, community group members, religious members and other activists from Pennsylvania, the Congressman referenced the growing number of uninsured – no fewer than seven million added to the roles this decade -- and the fact that costs in Pennsylvania have risen more than 80 percent since 2001 while wages have increased only 13 percent.

"With health care costs escalating, millions of Americans are unable to get the care they need and many are being forced into bankruptcy trying to get it," said Congressman Sestak. "Worse yet, health care costs are taking over our economy and will represent one fifth of our gross domestic product in the next decade. The status quo is unsustainable. We need health care reform now."

The US health care system is supported by employers, individuals, and the State and Federal governments. In the midst of this economic recession, revenue has decreased for employers, leading to layoffs and reduced health care coverage. This has caused many individuals to lose their employer-sponsored insurance. These lower revenues also put a strain on States, which in turn spend less on care for the uninsured just as their Medicaid roles increase.

Congressman Sestak detailed some of the measures that can reduce costs as we work toward a fair and sustainable system. These include: reimbursing health care providers for quality of preventive care, not quantity of visits; mandating that everyone is covered to drive down cost of premiums; and establishing a health insurance exchange so individuals and small businesses can join together to better bargain for affordable health care. In addition, the Congressman reaffirmed his support for the inclusion of a public health insurance option in the exchange.

"As part of health reform, I support the inclusion of a public plan that competes on a level playing field with private insurers, is subject to the same rules, regulations, and requirements as all other plans; and pays for care from individuals' premiums and copayments -- not general government revenue," said Congressman Sestak. "Competition and transparency in our health care system will drive down costs and a public plan is an important part of meeting those standards."

"I ran for Congress primarily because of one issue: health care. Several years ago, when my daughter was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, she received some of the best care modern medicine can provide under my military health care plan. We have been very blessed, but many families of hardworking Americans have not been so fortunate. The draft bill in the Education and Labor Committee is examining many ways to reach this goal and I look forward to working to produce legislation in that committee that allows more families to be as fortunate as mine."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.